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ABSTRACT

This document suggests a model structured to facilitate the growth of individual faculty members from initial awareness of the need for change through readiness to undertake limited experiments or to more sophisticated instructional development activities. The three-phased program based on self-initiated instructional improvement, empnasizes awareness activities, faculty support activities, and instructional development activities. (MJM)

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STIMULATING FACULTY READINESS FOR INSTRUCTIONAL DEVELOPMENT:

A CONSERVATIVE APPROACH TO IMPROVING COLLEGE TEACHING

"Things do not change, we do."
Henry David Thoreau

Most colleges and universities cannot afford the research and development approach to improving instruction. This article argues that a more modest approach is defensible and necessary to bridge the gap between research and development centers and college teachers.

Conventional wisdom has it that we are experiencing an era of extensive reform in American Higher Education as compared to earlier periods of contentment. Historical fact does not support this popular fiction. Colleges and universities in America are characterized by a long history of reform efforts. An impressive line of educators have advocated reforms which resulted in continual evolution of the university.

The earlier period of reform as well as the present one saw two basic change strategies at work. In the first the focus was upon changing content. The other strategy was based on an effort to alter the philosophy of instruction. Reformers who employed the former typically produced noteworthy but short-lived changes. In 1825 George Ticknor led the fight before the Harvard Corporation to reorganize the institution into distinct departments of study and to allow upper classmen a limited number of electives. His successes were short lived due to what he cited as "the power of passive resistance" wielded by the majority of his collegues who were less liberal than he in their educational views. A year later strenuous opposition on the part of the Amherst College faculty destroyed a similar change effort which was in its second year at that

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institution. Both examples represent short-lived innovations which were pushed through primarily on the charisma or personal reputation of the reformer but soon crumbled under the pressure of a disapproving and distrusting faculty.

In contrast to these numerous short-lived successes, Charles W. Eliot's forty year effort, as President of Harvard, to alter the basic composition of that institution is characterized by his refusal to impose change forcefully and his gradual step by step effort to have his faculty share in his dream. Many of the content change proposals have clashed with the established reward structures or have been diluted by their fadishness. The process approach seems a more effective vehicle to self renewal.

One need not slip into distant history to document the problems of changing the academy. The present scene is replete with reform proposals. Some restive thinkers are calling for alternatives to institutionalized learning while others continue to see possibilities for renewing the present structure. The emergence of instructional development is an example of the latter where changes in content can interface with sustained changes in process.

Several research and development centers* have adopted processes (or models) to produce validated instructional materials which are then disseminated nationally to individuals who are anxious for innovation. However, the centers have proven only moderately successful in bringing about wide change among less motivated professors in their own institutions. The research and development products are often viewed with suspicion, little known, or sometimes ignored. This is not to disparage the research and development center, but rather to suggest the need for another kind of effort to accompany the research and development of validated instructional products.

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*Indiana, Oregon System, Michigan, Michigan State, Syracuse, and Brigham Young University have such centers.

This "other kind of effort" should be a carefully managed process to promote faculty readiness for curriculum innovation (a la Eliot). The same application of systems theory and formative and summative evaluation techniques used in the instructional development process should characterize the faculty readiness effort. Problems unique to the institution should be carefully defined and information should be gathered about the institution. The assessment of institutional needs and resources will yield data which is invaluable in setting up goals and objectives of the readiness program.

The following "litmus paper" test may reveal how hospitable the climate is at a given college or university or may pinpoint some tasks that should precede the initiation of instructional development.

INSTITUTIONAL INVENTORY

1. Is there a modest sum of money available with administrative support to enable faculty to start projects either at mini-grant or another level (sabbatical or research and development)?

2. Is there a group of faculty members in academic departments with competencies in learning psychology, systems design, communications, media, or group processes who have an interest in applied research or consultant service?

3. Are there established faculty members outside the school of education who will offer leadership or cooperation with instructional development? Do they communicate with educationists?

4. Are basic services available, i.e., media, computer, library, equipped classrooms?

5. Does the reward structure promote recognition for achievement in teaching, in salary, promotion, and tenure activities (not statements but actual sanctions in the tenure considerations)? If promotions are defacto dependent on basic research achievements, the answer to this point is no.

6. Is student evaluation of teaching implemented as an institutional policy?

7. What is the attitude of the academic vice-president or his equivalent? (Number one may answer this.)

If the results from this inventory are favorable, it is likely that a substantial portion of the faculty (maybe up to 25%) will take initiatives to improve teaching such as writing proposals, attending seminars, or working on

design teams. The national climate is stimulating many professors to act. An instructional development program does not need coerced participation. It should attract a cross section of the faculty and be a legitimate and rewarding experience for them.

Charles W. Eliot serves as an historical example but few of us have forty years to replicate his particular design. No one claims that a faculty can be made ready for self-initiated instructional improvement overnight. The following model is proposed to decrease the amount of time needed to achieve that end.

A three-phased program, based on information garnered about the institution and its faculty, can be developed as a sort of ascending ladder of faculty readiness. The bottom rung might be labeled awareness activities, the second, faculty support activities, and the top, instructional development activities. A major purpose behind the graduated structure is to engage the faculty member where he is, regardless of his predilection for instructional improvement and offer meaningful service at his level. Close on the heels of that first objective is a second one of helping the faculty member move a step closer to initiating meaningful instructional improvement. The ultimate goal is to have each member of the faculty initiate a major development effort in courses (or modules of activity) for which he or she has responsibility.

The first rung of the model can be operationalized by awareness activities of several sorts. An occasional paper or newsletter series can be published and distributed to faculty members containing: (1) brief articles about issues in educational innovation, (2) mini reports of successful innovations by colleagues, (3) announcements of upcoming faculty seminars (voluntary sessions on topics of interest), (4) announcements of application opportunities for mini-grants or development grants, and (5) request forms through which an individual can request assistance. (Make it easy for them to take an initiative.)

Seminars can be held each quarter, which attract interested faculty to information sessions which have topics such as: How to Give a Lecture, How to Plan a Course, How to Lead a Group Discussion or Seminar, How to Make Media for Your Course, How to Individualize Your Course, What are Simulations, Alternative Testing Systems, Computer Assisted Instruction. These can be directed by regular teaching faculty who are invited to sponsor a session because they are recognized as being proficient in the particular topic area. A similar series of seminar sessions can be offered to graduate students who will soon be leaving the institution to take up college teaching.

A handbook with teaching suggestions may also be prepared for the faculty. The tone might be something like "everything you wanted to know about instruction but never dared ask." Departmental and summer workshops could also be sponsored to round out the awareness portion of the readiness model.

The second rung, the faculty support activities portion of the program, might include two elements: mini-grant competition where faculty write a brief proposal seeking money to support limited efforts to improve their instruction; and gratis consultation service from instructional design and evaluation personnel.

If professors initiate an idea, its chance of actual implementation will be considerably enhanced. The idea may be only embryonic so the support systems in the area of design, development, evaluation, and technology should develop a tactful consultant strategy to help the professor clarify the intent and increase the learning outcomes of the original idea.

The mini-grant program could support faculty course improvement proposals deemed worthy by an interdepartmental council. This council should include learning specialists from academic departments as well as recognized master teachers on the campus. Maximum mini-grant funding could vary from $100 to $1,000 for each proposal. Mini-grant activities might include the development

of self-paced materials, experiments with television microscopes in teaching, development of an audio-tutorial unit experiment, computer-assisted program, or any other model project that shows promise of increasing student learning.

Assistance in test development, evaluation of instructional materials, and general course design could be offered by the consultant service.

The top rung, instructional development activities, offer members of the faculty who wish to initiate a full scale developmental effort the opportunity to do so. Faculty Development Grants could be awarded to subsidize one quarter or one year of released time for the participating professor to produce learning materials. The professor could use the facilities of the research and development center and an instructional development specialist would be made available to work with the professor as a member of the design team. Their conceptualization would then be produced by a media service and be returned to the team for formative evaluation and validation.

The three-rung model is intended as a low profile, faculty readiness program to cultivate faculty acceptance for instructional development. Prior to implementation of such a program institutional leaders need to examine the possible factors that may thwart the program's potential. Some of the following obstacles may need to be neutralized first. Some suggestions are to:

Account for the suspicion of educationists in the arts and science faculty by sponsoring the program through the academic vice-president or dean of instruction.

Account for the cool attitude of many faculty toward audio-visual "gimmickery" by having the program independent of that service, but not in competition with it.

Account for the faculty suspicion of new administrative agencies (empire building) by remaining small and depending on contributions from faculty members in academic departments.

Account for the established reward structure which allocates highest priority to research by using the research custom of calling for proposals and awarding grants.

Account for the accusation of "fadism" that opponents may use by avoiding commitments to any one approach such as PSI, Behavioral Objectives, CAI, or Closed-Circuit Television.

Account for the lack of familiarity with major learning literature by distributing journal articles and offers of bibliography service regularly.

What is being proposed then is a modest service agency that communicates with the general faculty. It develops alliances with many existing powers on campus especially the academic vice-president but also communications, learning, media and group process scholars. It works closely with other services such as the library, audio-visual, graphics, photography, and television. It is intra university rather than inter university largely. It is likely to be eclectic in that it encourages trial and error.

The model is structured in such a way as to facilitiate the growth of individual faculty members from initial awareness of the need for change, through readiness to undertake limited experiments, on to more sophisticated instructional development activities. Its uniqueness--if it is indeed unique--lies in its dedication to the principle of self-initiated innovation by the members of the teaching faculty.

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